PITTA

Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
New Series Volume 14 Number 8 September 2017

FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 17th September 2017: Osman Sagar. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

This month we visit the back-waters of Osman Sagar, many of us may not have visited recently, and also Himayat Sagar on the return journey. Apart from the water-based birds, there are several other areas which can yield good birding. This would be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Talk by Ashish Jha: TRI-MARRIAGE OF SCIENCE, SOCIETY & BIRD
Thursday, 7th September 2017, 6.00PM: Hamburg Hall, Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500 034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Conservationist by birth, engineer by degree; Ashish Jha chose Ornithology as his area of research. For the last two years he has been weaving facts and data for his PhD study model on the Yellow-throated Bulbul. As legal bird-trapper, Ashish travels through the woods collecting genetic samples of the birds. When not chasing Bulbuls in the wild, Ashish Jha spends his time getting data and running analysis at the Laboratory for the Conservation of Endangered Species (CSIR-CCMB) Hyderabad.

He will give a talk on the connection between three seemingly different areas: science, society and birds. Ashish was one of the award-winning e-birders for the month of June in 2017 of the prestigious Bird Count India Award.

Please join us in this beautiful journey and explore the unique entanglement between science, society and birds.

TRIP REPORT: KENYA

Text and Photos: Vikramdev Rao

Secretary Bird

The trip to Kenya wasn't primarily for the purpose of birding. After having heard about the wild life that was fast disappearing, we decided to go on the popular safari. We took a Jet Airways flight from Hyderabad which connected us to Kenya Airways in Mumbai. Unfortunately the Kenya Airways flight was delayed and we arrived at Nairobi at 11:30PM.

We were scheduled to leave for Amboseli at 8:00AM the next day. The rooms were good and after a hearty breakfast we were met by our driver-cum-guide, Ken, who got us going by 8:30AM. It was a long journey to Amboseli but the roads were good until the last hour and a half, when we were confronted with a dusty metalled road. We were fortunate that the country elections were on and everybody was on a holiday so they could vote. Just like in India, there were long queues outside schools, waiting to vote. As a result traffic on the roads was almost non-existent and we made reasonable time. Ken told us that they were not permitted to exceed 80mph and so he stuck to that speed even though he could have gone faster.

Ostrich pair

Giraffe

This was the land of the Maasai (Maa is the language and Sai means 'people'). Almost as soon as we left the paved road, we started seeing animals and birds. We made only a couple of short stops, to photograph some Ostriches and Giraffes, as our objective was to get to our accommodation by lunch. We got to the Ol Tukai lodge just before 2:00PM, and went straight for lunch after registering. After a short rest we were off on a game drive at 4:00PM.

African Elephant

Amboseli is a relatively small reserve with Mount Kilamanjaro in the back drop. Unfortunately it was cloudy and Kilimanjaro was not visible. We spent two days at Amboseli and during our drives, found that African Elephants, Wild Buffaloes, Wildebeest, Zebras, Hippopotamuses, Thompson's Gazelles, Grant's Gazelles, Giraffes and Wart Hogs were aplenty.

African Jacana

Sacred Ibis

Hadada Ibis

The birds we saw were the African Jacana, Sacred, Hadada & Glossy Ibises, Hamerkop (whose head looks like a hammer), Blacksmith Plover, Black-headed & Purple Herons, White-bellied & Black-bellied Bustards, Egyptian Goose, African Spoonbill, Ostrich, African Pied Wagtail, Yellow-necked Francolin, and Saddle-billed Stork.

Hamerkop

White-bellied Bustard

Yellow-necked Francolin

We left for Lake Nakuru early on the morning of the August 10th, and it was an exceedingly long drive of 7 hours. Lake Nakuru is in the Great Rift Valley which traverses almost the whole of the African continent. We arrived at lodge by 2:00PM and rested after a late lunch. The weather was disappointing and so was the lake. There was absolutely no bird life except for a few Grey-crowned Cranes.

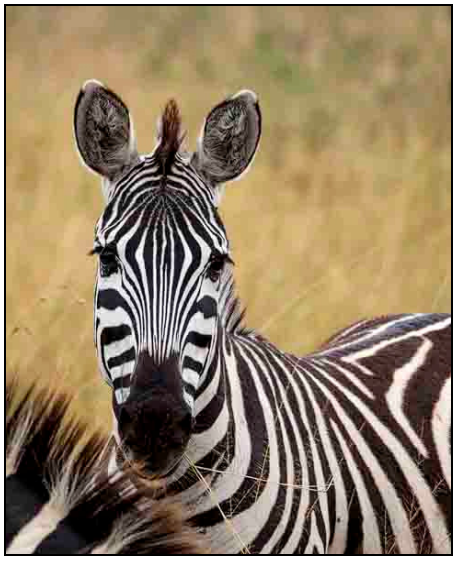
Grey-crowned Crane

Wild Buffalo

African Rhinoceros with young

The Flamingos for which Lake Nakuru is so well-known were missing. We did see some Wild Buffaloes and a Rhino with its baby but they were at a distance in the thick bush. We felt that our tour organizer had not planned our itinerary well and we were confronted with long drives to the different game reserves.

Wildebeest



Plains Zebra

We left for the Maasai Mara Game Reserve on August 11th, and got there in the afternoon, tired and hungry. After lunch and a short rest we were off on a game drive in the famous Mara Game Reserve and it certainly lived up to its reputation. Animals and birds abounded. The next two days were a treat and we saw huge herds of Wildebeest and Plains Zebra along with Topi Antelope, Elands, Hartebeest, Giraffes, Elephants, Wart Hogs, Dik-diks, Thompson's Gazelles, Impalas, Hippos, Crocodiles, and many more. The Lions, Cheetahs and a sole Leopard topped the list of our animal sightings.

Dik-Dik

Cheetah

African Leopard

African Lion

African Lionesses with cub

Southern Ground Hornbill

African Spoonbill

Marabou Stork

Common Bulbul

Yellow-throated Sandgrouse

The birds we saw were the Common Bulbul, Southern Crowned & Southern Ground Hornbills, Marabou Stork, Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, Rupell's Robin Chat, Secretary Bird, Superb & Greater Starlings, African Wattled Lapwing, Helmeted Guinea Fowl, Lappet-faced and White-backed Vultures, Rupell's Griffon, and many others which I did not make a note of.

We went to the Mara River to observe the migration which is one of the features of this ecosystem. It was a bit of a disappointment as there was hardly any crossing. There were vehicles galore, all waiting for the crossing but to no avail. A few Wildebeest and Zebras did cross but it was a quiet event.

Sunset on the Mara

Three nights at the Tipilikwani lodge and it was another long drive back to Nairobi for the flight back home. It was an altogether fascinating experience which could have turned out much better with better planning. We got back to Hyderabad on August 14th, tired but definitely wiser!

Wildebeest heading home at dusk

Some more photos taken during the trip:

Eland

Gnu

African Pied Wagtail

Blacksmith Plover

Greater Starling

Hartebeest

Helmeted Guineafowl

Topi Antelope

Rupell's Griffon

Superb Starling

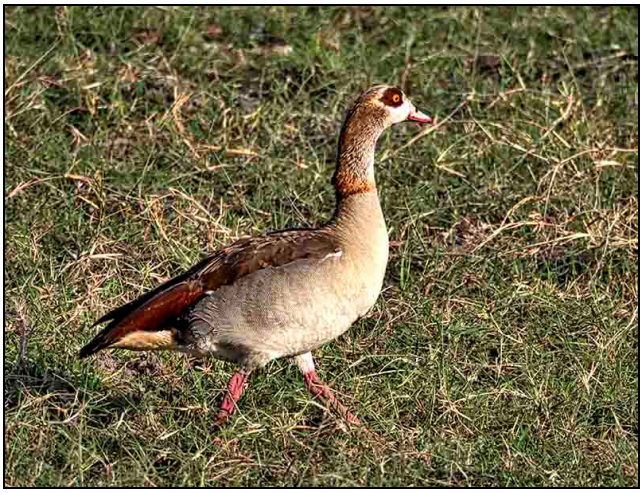
White-backed Vulture

African Wattled Lapwing

Black-headed Heron

African Hippopotamus

Impala



Egyptian Goose

Lappet-faced Vulture

Olive Baboon

Vervet Monkey

Rupell's Robin Chat

Saddle-billed Stork

Wart Hog

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Trip Report: Narsapur, 20th August 2017

Text: Sreenivas Nalla; Photos: Humayun Taher

Located 30km north of Hyderabad, Narsapur Reserve Forest is the largest forest in the suburbs of Greater Hyderabad spanning 30 to 40 km². It has a mini *ghat* section, a thick forest with a variety of trees, shrubs, herbs, and grasses, and several small lakes.

Despite the thunder storm predictions, we were eager to venture into the Narsapur forest for birding. I was very excited about this trip as I had never been to this forest. We gathered at Mangatrai Pearls, and started by 6.00 AM sharp. We then drove till Dundigal Airbase, where we halted for breakfast and coffee. We had sumptuous breakfast of *pooris*, poured some tea into the flask and then headed towards the forest.

There were monkeys lined up along the road throughout the forest, waiting expectantly for food from travelers. I wonder whether they have forgotten how to survive in the forest. I later learned that these were Rhesus Macaques and were being captured by GHMC from the city and released in the forest.

The weather was stormy and wet in the morning and we doubted if birding would be possible. However, the stormy weather soon turned into a light drizzle and then slowly started clearing up, though it continued to be cloudy most of the day. There was not much sunlight.

We were welcomed by the sweet song of Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*) near the temple where we parked our vehicles. The temple seemed abandoned. Surekha informed us that it opens only in summers and remains shut for the rest of the year.

We then equipped ourselves with binoculars and cameras and started our favourite hobby, birding. We first walked behind the temple where there were bamboo trees. A few steps later, we came across a pair of Red Collared Doves (*Stretopelia tranquebarica*) perched on the high tension wire. Further ahead we observed several more of these birds; I believe that the numbers of this dove have been increasing over the past few months.

Red Collared Dove (female)

The ground was wet and slippery as it had rained heavily the previous day. We had to watch our step due to the presence of water holes throughout the stretch.

As we heard the call of Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*), couple of us started tracking the call and the rest of the group stopped for a while and were fortunate to spot a Yellow-footed Green Pigeon (*Treron phoenicopterus*). Though the Grey-bellied Cuckoos seemed to be shy in nature, their loud and plaintive call *pee-pip-pee-pee* could be heard from a mile away. There was also a bunch of Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnia pagodarum*) perching alongside the Cuckoos.

Baya Weaver

I should mention that we observed a lot of Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) busy with nesting activity. Some of the males still hadn't completely developed breeding plumage, but the nests, however, appeared to be complete. The females may have been sitting inside already.

We spotted species like Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*), White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*), Yellow-eyed Babblers (*Chrysomma sinense*) and Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) as we walked towards a water body in the middle of the forest.

At the lake, a pair of Bronze-winged Jacanas (*Metopidius indicus*) was busy collecting nesting material. They looked magnificent in flight. Other water birds like Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*), Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), four types of Egrets – Cattle (*Bubulcus ibis*), Little (*Egretta garzetta*), Intermediate (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) and Great (*Casmerodius albus*) were also seen.

Singing Bushlark

As we finally settled down for breakfast, Humayun shared his experience and observations of this trip. He explained the hepatic morph in Grey-bellied Cuckoo and about the weird behavior of a Brahminy Starling which was feeding a fellow adult with caterpillar. I got to know some pointers in identifying the Tawny Pipit – it has dark lores whereas Paddyfield Pipit doesn't. Then Bala Dasari and Jayati explained the genetic reasons behind Cuckoos laying different colored eggs based on which bird's nest they choose to lay their eggs in.

It was fascinating and informative to learn more about the avian world. We pledged to continue this trend.

Even though we didn't sight as many birds as we expected, the trip turned out to be quite a good experience.

Here is the complete list of birds seen:

Sl. No.	Species Name	Sl. No.	Species Name
1	Common Iora	24	Little Grebe
2	Green Bee-eater	25	Red-wattled Lapwing
3	Red Collared Dove	26	Grey Heron
4	Spotted Dove	27	Little Egret
5	Baya Weaver	28	Intermediate Egret
6	Grey-bellied Cuckoo	29	Large Egret
7	Long-tailed Shrike	30	Indian Robin
8	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	31	Tawny Pipit
9	Red-vented Bulbul	32	Common Coot
10	Ashy Prinia	33	Common Tailorbird
11	Common Myna	34	Common Kingfisher
12	Asian Palm Swift	35	Yellow-eyed Babbler
13	Crested Treeswift	36	Black Drongo
14	Red-rumped Swallow	37	Pied Bushchat
15	Scaly-breasted Munia	38	Little Cormorant
16	Laughing Dove	39	Asian Openbill
17	Brahminy Starling	40	Indian Silverbill
18	Spot-billed Duck	41	Chestnut-shouldered Petronia
19	Cattle Egret	42	House Crow
20	Indian Pond Heron	43	Grey Francolin
21	Bronze-winged Jacana	44	Indian Peafowl
22	Pied Kingfisher	45	White-browed Bulbul
23	White-throated Kingfisher	46	Oriental Honey-buzzard

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Sighting of Curlew Sandpiper at Osman Sagar, Hyderabad, 23rd July 2017

Madhuri Mondal

Curlew Sandpiper (Photo: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

The spotting of the Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) at Osman Sagar Lake in Hyderabad on September 26th, 2017 created great interest among birders, as it is usually a winter visitor to the coastal parts of India. Breeding in the Tundra of Arctic Siberia, it migrates to Africa, Southeast Asia and Australasia during the winter. Since Hyderabad is not a usual wintering site for the Curlew Sandpiper, it is presumed that the rains may have prompted it to make a pit stop at Hyderabad while on its migration journey.

Its habitat ranges from coastal mudflats, salt pans, sandflats, muddy *jheels*, sandy rivers and inlands during floods. It is a Near Threatened species as per IUCN classification.

Features: The Curlew Sandpiper is very similar to the Dunlin, but a little taller and more slender, with longer legs, neck and bill, and a divided eyebrow-stripe. A key diagnostic feature is the downcurved bill. The breeding adult has a deep chestnut head, neck and belly, which are paler in the female. There is a black, white and reddish pattern on the upperparts, a white wing-stripe, and a white rump and chin. The non-breeding adult is greyer with a distinct supercilium. The juvenile has greyer underparts and a pale red breast. During flight the toes extend beyond the tail-tip.

Behaviour: It is usually found in mixed flocks with other waders, feeding mainly on insects, small invertebrates and worms, and also, occasionally, on seeds and other plant material. Of all the shorebird species, the breeding range of the Curlew Sandpiper in the Tundra and Taiga, mostly in Siberia, is the smallest in relation to its non-breeding range. The male performs an aerial display during courtship, and the nest is a shallow scrape in the ground, where the usual clutch of 3–4 eggs are laid.

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Trip Report: Nandi Hills, near Bengaluru, Apri 2017

Text and Photos: Sita Susarla

In the month of April 2017, we happened to visit Nandi Hills near Bengaluru. We planned our birding trip for 7:00AM, so that the visitors who would have come to watch the sunrise would have left, and would not disturb our birding. It was nippy on the hill but the calls of Hill Mynas (*Gracula religiosa*) warmed us up. We located a pair of them very high up on a tree near a pond. They were very vocal and kept calling for a long time. Occasionally there were responses from their brethren on distant trees. The orange-yellow nape looked like a golden collar from where we were standing.

Red-whiskered Bulbul

As we walked up the path from the pond we sighted Red-whiskered Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus jocosus*), most of them with nesting material, and a large number of White-cheeked Barbets (*Psilopogon viridis*). The calls, *Kotroo...Kotroo...*, starting with a loud *Trrr…* were indicative of breeding season for these Barbets. We initially mistook the call to be that of the Brown-headed Barbets (*Psilopogon zeylanicus*). However, as they came closer we saw the distinctive white cheek. The frugivorous birds were feeding on the fruits of various trees, while some of them were also eating insects.

White-cheeked Barbet

As we moved on and deviated from the path into thicker foliage, we spotted some ground birds. There was the Orange-headed Thrush (*Geokichla citrina*) which, as always, moved about quietly and cautiously. The Tawny-bellied Babbler (*Dumetia hyperythra*) too was quiet, giving company to the thrush.

Tawny-bellied Babbler

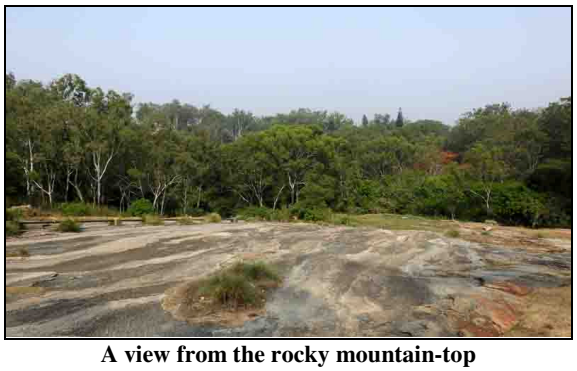
As we climbed up through the thicket we sighted some Puff-throated Babblers (*Pellorneum ruficeps*). They were many and moved very close to us. This was the first time we saw so many of them, and that too so close. Mindless of our presence, they fed on insects beneath the foliage, occasionally turning over the fallen leaves.

Puff-throated Babbler

Soon a flock of chirpy Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) zoomed across and landed on a nearby shrub.

Oriental White-eye

The amazing thing in this trip was that we saw most of the birds at very close range. As we climbed higher, we came to the rocky terrain from where we could get a panoramic view of the hills. An Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) hopped around as we enjoyed the fresh mountain air. It was very refreshing.



A view from the rocky mountain-top

We took a break to have lunch at the Mayura Pine Top, and continued with birding on the hills. At the Nehru House on the hill top, we sighted Jungle Mynas (*Acridotheres fuscus*) with their distinct forehead tuft. While some were feeding on food in garbage bins, others were seen resting on nearby branches.

Jungle Myna

We came across a fellow birder and, after chatting about the sightings, we came to know that the nursery near the pond housed a Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*). We were excited as we had never sighted one before, though we had heard the whistling call many times in Thattekad and other places.

Malabar Whistling Thrush

On our way back we stopped at the nursery, and the Keeper there advised us to wait till around 3:00PM or so to see the thrush. Almost bang on time, we spotted it quietly sitting deep inside the bushes – though it was not whistling this time. We could only get a couple of pictures before it disappeared deeper into the thicket.

As we moved around the nursery in the hope of seeing it again we found to our delight a pair of the beautiful Indian Blue Robins (*Larvivora brunnea*). We were lucky in sighting this bird as it is a winter migrant to the Western Ghats. Well, that's birding, isn't it? There is a surprise here and there to make up for the disappointment of not sighting the special endemic birds – like, for instance, the Nilgiri Wood Pigeons, which we could not spot.

Indian Blue Robin

We sat down on the bench under a tree for a while, and observed a Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) climbing up a tree. It repeatedly flew down to the base of the tree and climbed up again picking up an insect or two from the crevices of the bark. In the background we could hear the song of the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) interspersed with an occasional call of the Indian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*).

The sound of thunder however brought us to our feet and we rushed to our vehicle just in time. The climb down was equally thrilling with rain splashing across the mountains.

A complete list of birds seen is given below:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Sl. No.	Common Name
1	Hill Myna	8	White-cheeked Barbet
2	Common Myna	9	Purple Sunbird
3	Jungle Myna	10	Purple-rumped Sunbird
4	Red-vented Bulbul	11	Pale-billed Flowerpecker
5	Red-whiskered Bulbul	12	Ashy Prinia
6	White-browed Bulbul	13	Pied Bushchat
7	Coppersmith Barbet	14	Indian Robin

Sl. No.	Common Name	Sl. No.	Common Name
15	Indian Blue robin	31	Spotted Dove
16	Oriental Magpie Robin	32	House Crow
17	Green Bee-eater	33	House Sparrow
18	Ashy Drongo	34	Rose-ringed Parakeet
19	Black Drongo	35	Plum-headed Parakeet
20	Orange-headed Thrush	36	Rufous Treepie
21	Malabar Whistling Thrush	37	Olive-backed Pipit
22	Tawny-bellied Babbler	38	Common Iora
23	Yellow-billed Babbler	39	Blue Rock Pigeon
24	Puff-throated Babbler	40	Southern Coucal
25	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	41	Asian Koel
26	Indian Paradise-flycatcher	42	Blue-faced Malkoha
27	Oriental White-eye	43	Grey-bellied Cuckoo
28	Black Kite	44	Indian Golden Oriole
29	Eurasian Collared Dove	45	Common Tailorbird
30	Laughing Dove	46	Eurasian Hoopoe

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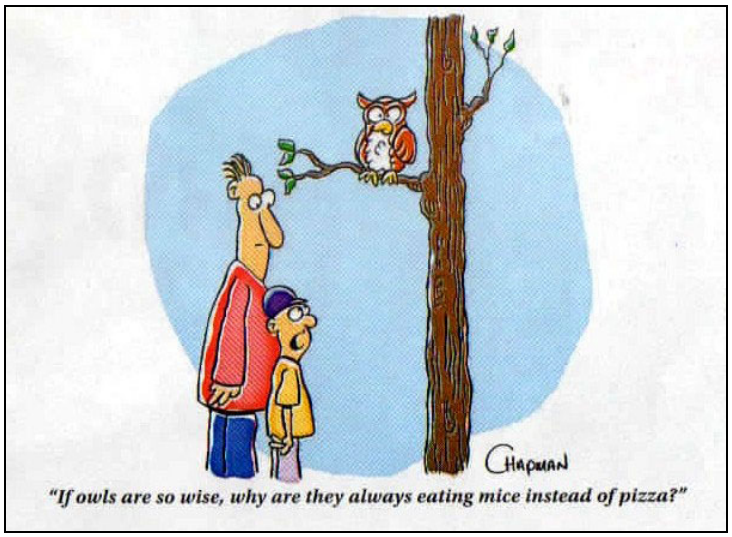
Bird Humour

Contributed by Shafaat Ulla



(From Reader's Digest, January 2017)

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Bird of the Month

Text: Umesh Mani; Photo: Sudhir Moorti

Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*)

Long-tailed Shrike (Osman Sagar, Hyderabad, Dec 2014)

Order: Passeriformes
Family: Laniidae
Genus: *Lanius*
Species: *L. schach*
Size: 24-25cm

Description & distribution: A member of the *Laniidae* family, the Long-tailed Shrike is widely distributed across Asia, from Kazakhstan to New Guinea. Several sub-species are recognized, but they invariably have the typical shrike-like features of a black mask and forehead, rufous rump and flanks, a small white shoulder patch, and a long, black tail with some rufous on the fringes. The bill is stout and hooked.

The Eastern or Himalayan sub-species *L. s. tricolor* and the Far Eastern sub-species *L. s. nasutus* have a wholly black head. The Central Indian sub-species *L. s. erythronotus* has the grey of the mantle and back washed with rufous, while the Southern Indian sub-species *L. s. caniceps* has pure grey.

Habitat & behaviour: The Long-tailed Shrike is usually found singly or in spaced-out pairs, and prefers scrub, open grassland and land under cultivation. Some of the temperate zone populations show migratory movements, while tropical populations tend to be sedentary. It adopts an upright stance while perching, and glides down to pick up lizards, small rodents and snakes, grasshoppers, large flying insects, and small birds; it has even been known to feed on fish and on the *Neem* fruit. Its practice of impaling prey on thorns before feeding has given it the name 'butcher bird'.

The usual call of the Long-tailed Shrike is a harsh, scolding call, and in fact the common English name of 'shrike' is derived from the Old English '*scríc*', or 'shriek', which refers to the shrill call. However, in breeding season it utters a quite melodious, rambling song of fairly long duration. It also has the ability to mimic the calls of several other birds.

Nesting: The breeding season of the Long-tailed Shrike is usually between February and July, with some local variations. The nest, a deep, loose cup of thorny twigs, grass, wool, rags and hair, is usually placed in thorny bushes, trees like *Flacourtia*, and wild date palms. The usual clutch consists of 3-6 eggs, which are pale greenish white with purplish brown spots and blotches, especially towards the broad end. The Long-tailed Shrike may sometimes raise a second brood in the same nest.

Local name: The Long-tailed Shrike is known as *'yerra lilinchi'* in Telugu, *'kattu kuruvi'* or *'pey kuruvi'* in Tamil, *'mattiya latora'* or *'kajala latora'* in Hindi and *'hara wataj'* (executioner) in Kashmiri.

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For Private Circulation Only
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For information, write to: Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*